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Viewing cable 09ANKARA643, TURKEY: PM ERDOGAN SHAKES UP HIS CABINET, TILTING

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09ANKARA643	2009-05-04 11:43	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Ankara

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000643

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/04/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY: PM ERDOGAN SHAKES UP HIS CABINET, TILTING
ISLAMIST

Classified By: Ambassador James Jeffrey, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

1. (C) Summary: To shore up support for his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) following its disappointing performance in March 29 local elections, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced May 1 an extensive overhaul of his cabinet, appointing nine new ministers, dismissing eight, and re-assigning 10. To appeal to AKP's pious voter base and fend off the rise of the Islamist Saadet Party, Erdogan appointed former Speaker Bulent Arinc as a Deputy Prime Minister, and several other individuals steeped in the Islamic Milli Gorus (National View) philosophy. Erdogan appointed former Foreign Minister Ali Babacan as the new State Minister in charge of the economy, to allow for one minister "to manage the economy with a single hand." Erdogan also appointed his former chief foreign policy advisor and architect of AKP foreign policy Ahmet Davutoglu as Foreign Minister -- the first AKP minister who is not a member of Parliament. End summary.

Key Cabinet Appointments

2. (C) Prime Minister Erdogan announced extensive changes to his cabinet on May 1, appointing nine new Ministers, dismissing eight, and shifting the positions of 10. The changes were widely expected following AKP's relative defeat in March 29 local elections (ref A). The new cabinet has 26 members, up from 25 ministers previously. A list of the entire cabinet is included at the bottom of this message. Highlights of the new cabinet include:

-- State Minister and Deputy PM Bulent Arinc. A member of the conservative-religious "Milli Gorus" (National View) wing of the party, Arinc has a reputation for being outspoken and angered secularists with his statements in favor of the headscarf and about the Turkish military on various occasions during his term as parliament speaker (2002-2007). Arinc is also one of the very few members of the government who has attempted to challenge Erdogan either publicly or in Cabinet meetings. Arinc's comeback is probably an attempt to counter the growing electoral appeal of the Islamist Saadet Party leading up to 2011 general elections. However, his legal background suggests that he may have a hand in crafting or presenting AKP's expected constitutional amendment packages. The cabinet is expected to specify the portfolios of Arinc and other State Ministers this week.

-- Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. An academic known as the behind-the-scenes architect of Turkish foreign policy, Davutoglu has been extremely influential with both Erdogan and Gul since AKP came to power. He came into the spotlight after his secret meetings with Hamas leader Halid Mesal in the winter of 2006. While many MFA diplomats have resented Davutoglu's strong influence on Turkey's external affairs, some have welcomed the appointment of the theoretician with direct access to the top. Davutoglu will be the first non-MP to serve as an AKP minister.

-- DPM and State Minister for the Economy Ali Babacan. When announcing the new cabinet, Erdogan said that he wanted the economy minister to be "much more powerful and manage the economy with a single hand." The position is a promotion for Babacan, who is regarded as having performed well as Economics Minister from 2002-2007, prior to his appointment as Foreign Minister, where he received mixed reviews. In his new role, Babacan will have overall control of all economic institutions, including the Treasury, state-owned banks, the Capital Markets Board and banking watchdog BDDK. Unlike 2002, when he led Turkey out of the 2001 economic crisis, Babacan will not have a recovery plan and IMF deal already in place that he only needs to execute, and the export-led growth model that worked then will not work this time.

Taking on this role at a time when the Turkish economy and Turkey's major export markets are heading into a recession will be a major challenge. His being "kicked upstairs" was seen by some as a signal of an internal AKP influence shift from Babacan mentor Gul to Erdogan. But given the importance of Babacan's new role, Davutoglu's sustained dominance of foreign policy formulation, and the continued strength of the "Gul wing," we do not accept this interpretation.

-- Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin. Formerly an AKP parliamentary deputy group chair (whip), Ergin is an Erdogan loyalist who is close to the conservative wing of the party. Ergin has been an architect of AKP's proposed constitutional changes.

-- State Minister and DPM Cemil Cicek. In retaining a DPM position, this former Justice Minister and GOT spokesman has demonstrated that he is still a political heavyweight. Cicek is the only cabinet member left who joined AKP from the Motherland Party (ANAP).

-- Labor and Social Security Minister Omer Dincer. The former PM U/S has attracted attention for his conservative-religious views, which were on display during a 1995 speech when he suggested the Turkish Republic was worn out and should be replaced with an Islamic state structure. Dincer also faced allegations of plagiarism for a book he wrote in 1996, leading the Higher Education Council (YOK) to revoke his right to teach at a university.

-- Education Minister Nimet Cubukcu. An Erdogan loyalist, she received mixed reviews from women's rights organizations for her prior role as Women's Affairs Minister. Erdogan likely elevated her, and named Selma Aliye Kavaf as State Minister, to fulfill repeated promises to give women a larger role in the party. Erdogan is probably also trying to shore up support from female voters who, according to some pollsters, turned out in less-than-expected numbers for AKP in local elections. We have been told that AKP's internal polling shows falling support among women voters, in particular. Cubukcu is the first woman to hold the Education Minister position.

-- Energy and Natural Resources Minister Taner Yildiz. A Kayseri MP and the AKP's energy advisor, Yildiz was long rumored to be the next energy minister. Yildiz has better relations with Azerbaijan than former minister Guler did (ref B), but will face the same problem as his predecessor in trying to get the GOT to speak with one voice on energy policy.

-- Culture and Tourism Minister Ertugrul Gunay. Many expected Erdogan to replace this former CHPer who has not been afraid to speak his mind. He recently provoked the PM's ire when he told journalists that the government had overreached during the most recent Ergenekon sweeps. Keeping Gunay on as a minister is a gesture to capture liberals' votes.

AKP Hopes Fresh Blood Will Bring New Energy

13. (C) AKP officials tell us that the new names will infuse energy into a party that had appeared "worn out" to voters in March 29 local elections. AKP Vice Chair Ismael Safi said the changes would "begin a new chapter for AKP as we look toward 2011 general elections." The cabinet reshuffle is the first phase in a larger party shake-up, according to AKP parliamentary deputy group leader Bekir Bozdag, who told us that the PM would make significant changes to the party administrative leadership during AKP's general party congress in September. Bozdag also noted that further change is likely to come in September, when the term of the current Parliament Speaker Koksak Toptan ends, as well as the terms of the parliamentary committee chairs and party deputy group chairs.

¶4. (C) Erdogan, known to prefer stability in his cabinet, avoided making major changes until AKP's poor performance in local elections left him no other option. He was stung that AKP failed to meet his earlier expectations, and has been even more sobered, we understand, that AKP's internal polling shows the party has dropped down to 32 percent, with even lower numbers among women and young voters. He appears to have carefully weighed many factors in constructing the cabinet that he will take into 2011 general elections. While the cabinet is composed mainly of Erdogan loyalists, the PM clearly took into account the desires of President Gul by appointing several well known Gul loyalists, including State Minister Babacan, Interior Minister Besir Atalay, State Minister Mehmet Aydin, and Energy Minister Taner Yildiz. Some Erdogan loyalists, such as Mehmet Ali Sahin, Nazim Ekren, and Huseyin Celik were excluded from the cabinet, but may be compensated in the coming weeks with now-vacant AKP parliamentary leadership jobs, or with strong positions in the AKP party organization at the party's September congress.

The return of Ali Babacan to be at the helm of the economy indicates that he is still in good standing with Erdogan and that, despite his dismissive rhetoric during the election campaign, Erdogan recognizes the seriousness of the economic situation.

¶5. (C) In a likely reaction to the strong performance of Islamist Saadet Party in local elections and much speculation about the ability of Saadet's young leader Numan Kurtulmus to chip into AKP's political base, Erdogan crafted a more conservative-religious cabinet. He selected individuals who adhere to the "National View" doctrine of Mecmettin Erbakan, the founding father of the political Islam movement in Turkey, such as Bulent Arinc, Omer Dincer, and Sadullah Ergin, while ousting more liberal ministers like former DPM Nazim Ekren, State Minister Murat Basesgioglu, and State Minister Kursad Tuzmen. In doing so, Erdogan seems to have walked back, if slightly, from his statements when AKP first came to power that, "We have changed and developed. We have taken off the National View shirt."

The New Cabinet

¶6. (U) The full cabinet:

- State Minister and DPM Cemil Cicek
- State Minister and DPM Bulent Arinc
- State Minister and DPM Ali Babacan (Economy coordinator)
- State Minister Egemen Bagis (EU chief negotiator)
- State Minister Hayati Yazici
- State Minister Mehmet Aydin
- State Minister Faruk Nafiz Ozak
- State Minister Mehmet Zafer Caglayan
- State Minister Faruk Celik
- State Minister Cevdet Yilmaz
- State Minister Selma Aliyet Kavaf (Women's affairs)
- Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin
- National Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul
- Interior Minister Besir Atalay
- Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu
- Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek
- National Education Minister Nimet Cubukcu
- Public Works and Housing Minister Mustafa Demir
- Health Minister Recep Akdag
- Transportation Minister Binali Yildirim
- Agriculture Minister Mehmet Mehdi Eder
- Labor and Social Security Minister Omer Dincer
- Industry and Trade Minister Nihat Ergun
- Energy and Natural Resources Minister Taner Yildiz
- Culture and Tourism Minister Ertegrul Gunay
- Environment and Forestry Minister Veysel Eroglu

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Jeffrey